

## *Too Much is Never Enough: Bush's Military Spending Spree*

By Michelle Ciarrocca

Forget that the Bush administration is sending U.S. troops to train local forces in Yemen, the Philippines, and Uzbekistan, and that since September 11th the U.S. has stepped up military aid to Turkey, Pakistan, India, Jordan, and a number of countries who are “with us” in the war on terror.

Forget the fact that a number of these countries were previously prohibited from receiving U.S. weapons and military assistance because of poor human rights records, ongoing armed conflict, or repressive practices. Forget that September 11th has been used to justify a \$396 billion military budget, the largest increase in defense spending in two decades, and that the war in Afghanistan is costing more than \$1 billion a month.

The human rights conditions on U.S. military aid and training programs that have been put in place over the past few decades have been pushed aside in the headlong rush into the global war on terrorism. Human rights abuses are being ignored or forgotten as the U.S. arms its allies in this new war. The goal is freedom, no matter what the cost and no matter what the human rights practices of our new partners. Defending his military budget, Bush said “I’ve asked for the largest increase in defense spending in 20 years not only because it will fulfill our commitment to support our troops, but because it recognizes that this country is in our war for the long pull—that we’re interested in defending freedom no matter what the cost.”

The president is now asking for more money.

President Bush has recently submitted a \$27 billion emergency supplemental request to Congress. The Pentagon will receive almost half of the emergency request—\$14 billion. Out of that amount, \$130 million will be spent on

unspecified foreign countries or “indigenous forces.” What is most alarming is that more than \$1 billion of that request has been tagged with the clause “notwithstanding any other provision of law”—meaning that the few laws in place to keep military aid and weapons out the hands of human rights abusers are no longer relevant.

This means that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld would have sole discretion over the funds, making congressional notification or approval unnecessary and waiving existing stipulations. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-VT), chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on foreign operations, noted that many congressional members are wary of giving the Pentagon this new authority. “The concerns this raises are less about the sums requested than about the troubling precedent it would set, and that makes this a controversial proposal,” said Leahy.

*Defense News* reported that under the State Department’s Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program \$372.5 million will go “to the militaries of other nations cooperating in the U.S.-led campaign against terrorism.” About \$50 million will go to Afghanistan, \$75 million to Pakistan, \$20 million for Yemen, and \$28 million will go to Turkey (to name just several of the recipients).

FMF grants and loans must be used by the recipient nation to purchase U.S. defense-related items—a nice boost for U.S. defense contractors. As Jim Lewis, from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, noted, “Now is the time to cram in as much as possible because Congress is in a giving mood.”

The supplemental funding gives another \$420 million to the Department of Defense to be used “for payments to Pakistan, Jordan, and

other key cooperating nations for logistical and military support provided” in the war on terrorism, and \$525 million in Economic Support Funds (ESF). The Federation of American Scientists points out that the ESF allocations are provided on a grant basis and are available for a variety of economic purposes, like infrastructure and development projects. And, although not intended for military expenditure, these grants allow the recipient government to free up its own money for military programs. Other troubling components of President Bush’s request include the lifting of prohibitions on the use of U.S. aid for counterterrorism in Colombia, and \$8 million to vet, train, and equip an Indonesian police counterterrorism unit.

Members of the House Appropriations Committee have responded to the president’s request by increasing the supplemental aid to \$29.79 billion, adding on another

\$1.77 billion for the Pentagon and funds for everything from election reform to aid to Israel and airport security. The Senate is expected to mark up the bill as soon as the House finishes its version. President Bush has asked for the bill to be finalized by Memorial Day.

As history has shown us, using arms sales and military assistance as a way to win friends and intimidate adversaries has not only fostered serious human rights abuses in the recipient nations, it has also undermined U.S. interests by spreading instability and fueling conflict around the world.

While the Bush administration is willing to forget that military assistance was suspended to India and Pakistan because of their nuclear weapons tests in 1998, we should remember that India and Pakistan’s ongoing dispute over the territory of Kashmir has heated up dangerously. While President Bush is ready to overlook Congress’ decision to sever

military ties with Indonesia in September 1999 because of its widespread human rights abuses, we should remember the State Department’s most recent human rights report warns that Indonesia’s “record remained poor, and it continued to commit serious abuses.”

While the Bush administration is cooking up estimates for a \$400 billion military budget, we should remember that it was George W. Bush who campaigned for president as a Pentagon reformer. Bush even went so far as to tell Al Gore during the debates, “if this is a contest to see who can spend more money, I’m going to lose.” In this case, we’re all losing.

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